

Testimony in Opposition to Section 6 of An Act Concerning Relief of state Mandates on School Districts, Raised Bill 1142

Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann and other members of the Education Committee my name is Charlotte Leslie and I am here today to speak in strong opposition to Section 6 of the Raised Bill 1142.

I would like to tell you of my interest in this bill starting with my most recent involvement with school IAQ and going backwards to when I first became aware of the ramifications of ignoring maintenance in our school buildings. Reporting on school IAQ conditions every five years is tantamount to giving school districts a license to ignore them. I am the President-Elect of the Fairfield PTA Council and will become the President in May. Previously I was the PTA Council's Tools for Schools (TfS) Representative, overseeing all the parent reps from our 16 school based TfS teams. As this TfS Representative, I observed firsthand the importance of annual walkthrough inspections, action plans and reporting. They promote better planning, improved communication, prevent health hazards and encourage greater fiscal responsibility by addressing IAQ issues early on when they are much less expensive.

I am a founding member of the Connecticut Foundation for Environmentally Safe Schools (ConnFESS). This relationship was a direct result of having been the PTA President-Elect of McKinley Elementary School. For those of you not familiar with the McKinley story, the building closed in 2000 and was demolished in 2002 because over 75 of its occupants became ill in the building. Some of them never did recover their health. For years it had been raining inside the building and no one was watching. That first year our children were separated by grade and sent to 6 host schools via two bus rides each way and were housed in art rooms, music rooms, libraries and our kindergarten was housed in a cafeteria separated by partitions. Therefore, I have seen first hand what happens to children and adults when we do not watch our school buildings.

Delayed and inconsistent reporting encourages delayed and inconsistent implementation of IAQ programs. This contributes to poor planning, decreased communication, increased potential for long and short-term health problems among students and staff and significant waste of tax dollars remediating needed neglected indoor air quality problems such as moisture incursion and mold growth. It has been nine years since McKinley was permanently shut down. Many new Fairfield residents did not live here nine years ago and cannot appreciate the difficult lessons learned from that experience.

I will be attending a meeting tonight concerning the budget that the Board of Education has presented to my town. My superintendent will be addressing the Board of Selectman to discuss what, if anything more, can be done to decrease the budget by 3 million dollars. With more children leaving the private sector and going back to public schools, our town is looking at over 10,010 children entering our system next fall. We can not afford to lose teachers, and past history has shown me that we will most certainly cut maintenance. By changing the reporting process from every other year to 5 years, we are needlessly tempting fate and could end up back where we were in 2000 when schools

were being shut down and students were being rushed by ambulance to emergency rooms as a direct result of poor IAQ in schools.

As a member of ConnFESS I am also calling upon the Education Committee to:

1. Drop Section 6 of Raised Bill 1142.
2. Read the ConnFESS reports on ways to improve the implementation of IAQ legislation in Connecticut. These reports can be found at:  
<http://pollutionfreeschools.org/connfess/reports/> .  
(See page 12 from the 2006 report for a list of ongoing problems.)
3. Reassess:
  - a) The purposes for this reporting process
  - b) The most useful information for the CT General Assembly and the public
  - c) Best ways to collect and use such information
4. Work with ConnFESS and its supporters to put in place an effective reporting mechanism that is accurate, accessible, meaningful, verifiable and current.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.